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AUTHOR Dodge, Carol J.
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ABSTRACT

Focusing on a comparison of actual roles with stereotypical roles of tribal women, this unit emphasizes the fact that roles of Indian women of the past were dependent upon tribal customs and living conditions. The narrative section of the unit examines typical roles in Woodland tribes and describes the false information and stereotypes which originated in the writings of early white settlers. Designed for girls from 9 to 18 years of age, the unit has two objectives: to dispel the distorted stereotypes that still exist about early traditional Indian women and to help the girls appreciate their tribal heritage. The leaders' guide provides background information, learning activities, and a set of discussion questions designed to help girls deal with the distorted stereotypes that may affect them today. (Author/CM)

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Traditional Roles

by Carol J. Dodge

illustrated by Vicki Wyman

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Traditional Roles

by Carol J. Dodge

illustrated by Vicki Wayman

About The Author

Carol Dodge, a Menominee, has a B.A. degree in elementary education from the College of Santa Fe and an M.A. degree in education administration from the University of Minnesota. She has served as a preschool and first grade teacher. Presently she is curriculum coordinator for the Menominee Indian School District.

Vicki Wayman, a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewas, did the illustrations for the unit.

1978

About The Program

"Traditional Roles of Women" has been developed as part of the project Choices & Careers, Free to Choose, a career development project for tribal girls. The project was developed with the assistance of tribal women in Wisconsin and was funded with special needs funds from Extension Service—USDA.

W3GX7

Fact Sheet

Traditional Roles - Unit for Girls

Choices & Careers
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"Traditional Roles of Women" focuses upon comparing actual roles to some stereotypes of tribal women. Some typical roles of Woodland tribes are examined in this unit. The unit emphasizes that women from each of the many tribes had varying roles.

Discussion questions are provided so that girls will be better able to deal with distorted stereotypes that may affect them today.

Background information for teaching the unit is included in the leaders guide (W2GX7) and Traditional Roles of Women, (W3GX7), for girls ages 9 to 18.

The film Woodland Indians of Early America may be used with the unit. The film recreates the daily life of a Chippewa family as they fish, hunt wild turkey, and gather wild rice. The film may be ordered from Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction, P. O. Box 2093, Madison, WI 53701.

Another useful reference for teaching the unit is the book, The Chippewa Indians: Rice Gatherers of the Great Lakes, by Sonia Bleeker.

About The Author

The unit was adapted from the unit "Traditional Roles," written by Carol Dodge; the unit "Growing Up to Be a Woman," by Clara De Coteau; and the unit "Famous Indian Women," by Janet Pascale.

Lois Metoxen Strong, an Oneida, has a B.S. degree in psychology from University of Wisconsin—La Crosse. She is presently the project director for Wisconsin Tribal Women, Incorporated.

Vicki Wayman, a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewas, did the illustrations for the unit.

About The Program

"Being an Indian Woman" has been developed as part of the project Choices & Careers, Free to Choose, a career development project for tribal girls. The project was developed with the assistance of tribal women in Wisconsin and was funded with special needs funds from Extension Service-USDA.

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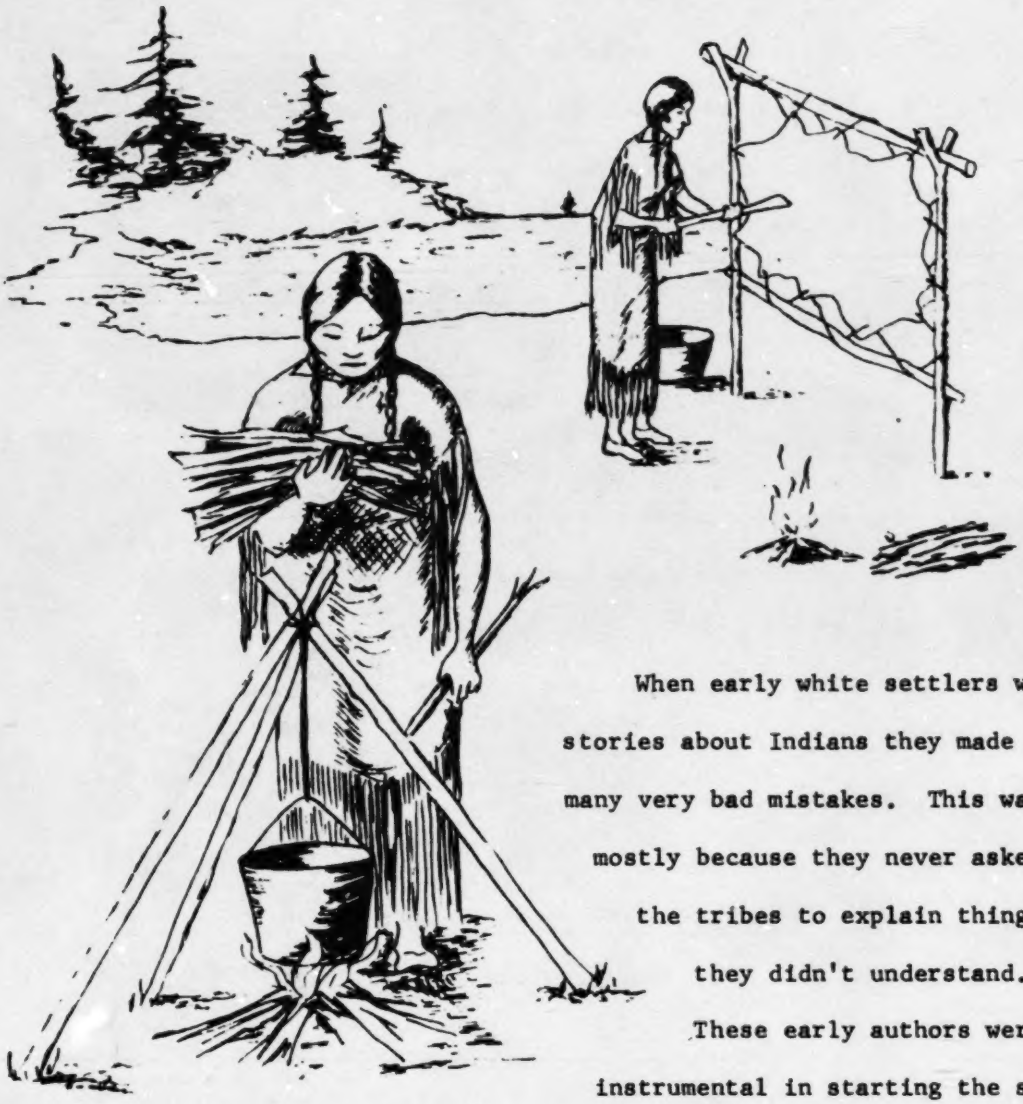
Traditional Roles



When early white settlers wrote stories about Indians they made many, many very bad mistakes. This was mostly because they never asked the tribes to explain things they didn't understand. These early authors were instrumental in starting the stereotypes that still exist. The following poem is a good example of this type of writing:

Pity the poor squaw,
Beast of burden, slave,
Chained under female law
from puberty to grave.

Anonymous

Where the author of this poem got his information is a mystery as well as the tribe he was speaking of. The idea that an Indian woman was

completely at the mercy of her tribal men is certainly without foundation, as well as the idea that she was nothing more than a beast of burden. In fact, the exact opposite was true. Indian women were not only highly regarded and protected, but many occupied positions of authority in both civil and religious affairs.

In the early days, when the tribes were still strong, Indian men and Indian women treated one another as equals. That is, the men did not consider themselves superior to the women. This was a very difficult concept that early white settlers never did understand. Consequently, these early authors did not realize that even though each tribal group had separate roles for men and women, the men never hesitated to help the women when it was needed or vise versa. Actually almost everything Indian people did was done as a family unit. For example, in the fall the whole family would help in harvesting wild rice. Each member of the family had special duties. The men paddled the canoes while the women knocked the rice into the boat. The children gathered wood and made the camps ready for drying and parching the rice. In the early spring everyone worked together in the maple sugar camps. All members of the family knew they were dependent on one another and helped in every way they could.

A traditional Indian women's day began at dawn, and she seldom knew moments when some work was not waiting for her. If there was no cooking to be done, or plants to be gathered, or berries and nuts to be harvested, or meat to be dried and fish to be smoked, there was a basket to be finished, moccasins

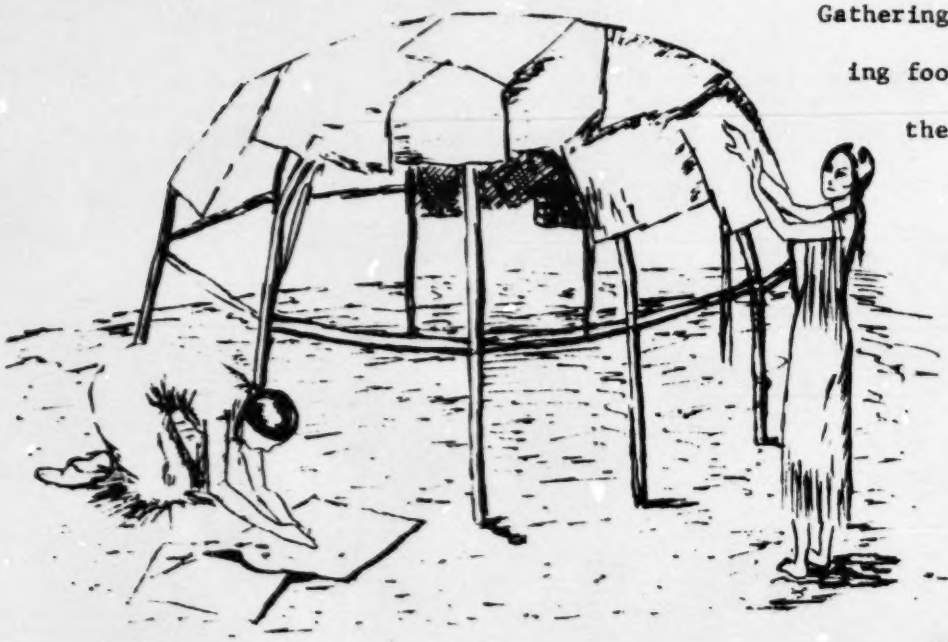
and clothing to be made, hides to be tanned and decorated with quills and painted designs, or packing to be done for travel or to accompany the men on a hunt; there were also the children and young people to be trained, and dances and ceremonials to get ready for and participate in. This may seem like a lot of work, but it was not all done in one day. A good portion was done according to seasons, as was mentioned above: in the spring, making maple sugar; in the late summer, picking berries; in the fall, harvesting wild rice; in the winter, repairing the birchbark utensils, making clothing for the entire family, etc. This was also a time for teaching children the legends and history of the tribe. Young girls also learned to make and decorate clothes from buckskin, to weave baskets, bags, and mats, and to work with birchbark.

They practiced on their dolls under the watchful eye of their mother or grandmother and sometimes their aunts. Usually by the time a girl was 14 she was able to do all the household duties of a traditional Indian woman.

> Can Indian girls today say the same thing? What do you do today to help your family out?

In all tribes the women were assisted in their work by young people (male and female), by men unable to hunt because of an injury, and by older members of the tribe. For example, berry picking was generally the job of young unmarried girls and old women. But when an abundance was found, the whole family would join in so that the greatest possible

amount could be preserved before the berries started to spoil.



Gathering and preparing food was not the only thing the women were responsible for. In most of the tribes the women were both the architects and the builders of the houses. Their skill in constructing these dwellings was remarkable, and each house was well adapted to the area and climate where they lived. Again they were assisted by other members of the family when actually putting up the wigwams or tipis.

Generally the women were highly regarded by the men for their wisdom and knowledge of the ways of nature. Whenever they were moving the camps, the women usually decided when the move was to be made and where the new camp was to be located. In other words, Indian men did not make the decisions by themselves, as it is portrayed in the movies or TV. Indian women were always consulted and played an important role in all areas of their lives. However, what they were more interested in was to be the <u>best</u> in anything they did—the best basket maker, the best tanner of hides, the best healer of sicknesses, etc. All of these tasks took a lot of patience and a lot of practice when they were growing up.

The career choices these early Indian women had were very limited. Usually a girl's training for this began in childhood. Little girls were provided with dolls and small cradleboards and tiny dishes and baskets. The tots played at cooking and caring for their babies in much the same manner as little girls do today. When a girl was five or six she would be taken by the older girls or grandmothers to gather berries, plants, and nuts.

All girls, as soon as they were responsible—sometimes as early as seven years—were assigned regular household duties. Generally this meant caring for a younger member of the family. Also, at this age girls were expected to help cook the food, gather wood, or carry water from a nearby stream.

The division of labor and responsibilities between men and women were not cut and dried as historians and anthropologists have led us to believe. The women's share of responsibilities and obligations were not more than what was expected of the men. Even the responsibility of caring for the very young was considered to be a family obligation and not just the mother's.

Discussing the role of a traditional Indian woman in this manner makes it seem that she was overburdened with work. However, these tasks were not just work. They were also social activities, and the women chatted and sang songs while doing the jobs. Actually a traditional Indian women had many free hours to do whatever she felt like doing. The diet of the Woodland Indians was basically meat and fish. Obtaining these were generally the responsibility of the men and boys.

Also, contrary to popular belief, Indian women were quite proficient at preserving food. When the entire family worked together, they were quite capable of gathering and storing enough food to last all winter. This left the women more time to make baskets, or decorate their clothing with beautiful designs made from quills, or do whatever they wanted to do.

Have you ever taken a good look at the beautiful baskets Indian women make, or thought about the beautiful designs the women created with porcupine quills? Now think about the process used to make baskets—getting the materials, dyeing the materials for the designs, etc. You must also remember that these early Indian women did not have the nice sharp knives and scissors that women have to work with today. Do you think that women who were overburdened with work would feel like making beautiful designs on their baskets or clothes?

It appears that the main goal of most of the young Indian girls was to gain the high degree of respect in which Indian women were held.

However, they did have as much independence as the men. Many tribes even allowed women to fight in battles if they so desired.

When reading about the early life of Indian women, you should remember one important aspect. The early whits authors were writing about Indians who had already been exposed for several years to the pressures and customs of white colonists. They were also writing about Indians with the idea that they were inferior and savage.

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Traditional Roles Unit for Girls

by Carol J. Dodge

Leaders Guide

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Traditional Roles – Unit for Girls

The traditional role of an Indian woman would be impossible to define because it depended on the tribal group she belonged to. So the role of a traditional Oneida woman might differ somewhat from that of a traditional Chippewa or Potawatomi or Menominee woman. This role was also dependent on the section of the country she lived in. Indian women living in the desert would certainly have different things to do than women living in the Great Lakes area. It would be difficult to try to include each tribe because of the large amount of information. For purposes of this unit, only the traditional role of Woodland Indian women will be discussed. The areas that will be covered will be the general ones that pertain to all the Woodland tribes. But keep in mind that each tribal group had its own traditional roles for both men and women, and many of the tribes were as different as day and night.

When discussing the role of traditional Indian women, the main thing to keep in mind is that the Indian women's role we know today has been distorted by many factors. The main influence was the various branches of Christianity. Christians thought it was their duty and right to remove the "pagan" traditions of all Indians. This was done by placing Indian children in schools far away from tribal and family influences. A large percentage of the children were not allowed to go home until they became adults. By then they had learned the distorted subservient roles we know today.

Following are excerpts from the book Indian Women of the Western Morning, by John Upton and Donna M. Terrell. If you use this book, you have to read it with an open mind. Even though these authors tried

to be objective, they make very derogatory statements that are based totally on guesswork and not on facts.

"The concept that woman was made from man is not found in Indian religion. Indians accept and adhere to the doctrine that the female of their kind was created simultaneously with the male. For apparent reasons, each was endowed with peculiar qualities and sensibilities, neither was accorded supremacy, and each was made dependent upon the other for existence." (Page 4) ". . .there is nothing in any Indian mythology to suggest the principle that man preceded woman." (Page 16)

"In no case in the tribes maintaining the clan system were women without property rights, both the right of personal ownership and the right to dispose of personal belongings by giving or willing them to sons and daughters. Weapons and ceremonial paraphernalia belonged to men, but implements used for cultivating the soil, for preparing food, for dressing skins, for making garments and tipis, and other household articles belonged to women. In some tribes, raw materials, such as meat, corn, and skins, belonged to women. A woman could build and own a house, and among most people the lodge or tipi in which a family dwelt belonged to the mother. Only under the rarest of circumstances could the property of a woman be taken from her, and in most tribes she could under no condition be deprived of her possessions by her husband, even if their marriage was dissolved." (Page 29)

"White settlers in early colonial times saw that invariably an Indian man preceded his [wife] when walking along a road, a trail, or in a village, and so the legend was born that the woman was inferior in social status to the man, her lord and master, and therefore was required to show her respect by keeping behind him. In reality, the custom had nothing whatsoever to do with ethics, protocol, or rank. When

walking or entering a community or a lodge, an Indian man went ahead of his wife expressly for the purpose of protecting her from unexpected danger—in Indian idiom, 'to make the way safe for her.'" (Page 42)

"The large number of women's games and sports and societies enumerated in scientific studies makes it clear that most Indian women enjoyed . . . relief from arduous and routine duties. They attended what might be termed sewing bees, vied in quilling and weaving contests, and took part in numerous ceremonials and social functions from which men were excluded. A game of shinny in which a hair ball covered with buckskin and a curved stick were used was wisely palyed by women. In another common women's game, a ball was thrown with a long rod on whose end was a skin loop. In this contest a player was not permitted to touch the ball with the hands. It may be safely assumed that women also found time to engage in the popular pastime of gossip." (Page 46)

"Indian women were well informed as to the comparative values of foods; they knew the nutritional benefits to be derived from certain plants and the dangers inherent in unbalanced diets. They knew that the finest food of all was meat, but that meat along did not answer all the demands of the body. Whatever they may have called protein, if indeed they defined it at all, they knew that its greatest source was meat. Thus, few meals were prepared without meat in some form, and among agricultural tribes, meats were usually served with maize (corn) or beans, secondary sources of protein. They understood as well, however, that other elements were needed to sustain good health, such things as starches, sugars, and fats. Many plants, both wild and domesticated, contained these substances." (Page 67-68)

"Historical narratives and government reports frequently and unjustly charge Indian women with moral degradation, recounting how they

were easily available to male settlers and soldiers. These accounts should be cautiously considered, and the circumstances carefully analyzed. Illustrative of this admonition is the tragic plight of some six or seven thousand Navajo who were driven into a concentration camp on the Pecos River in New Mexico. The government failed to provide them with sufficient food or other necessities. Hundreds were forced to live in holes in the ground, sheltered only by pieces of discarded army tents, cowhides, and brush. Many were dying of malnutrition. Many were almost naked, and most of them were barefoot and were suffering from pneumonia and tuberculosis. Navajo women sold themselves for food to the four thousand soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Sumner.

"Similar situations and conditions prevailed over a long period of time throughout the West. In each case Indian women were condemned as sluts, as whores, as devoid of human decency, in the hypocritical mouthings of corrupt politicians and in the sermons of ministers and priests blinded to reality by moral bigotry. Not only the government but American society in general can take credit for forcing Indian women to sell themselves in a final desperate effort to survive, and under no moral standard whatsoever may their actions be defined as professional prostitution." (Pages 134-135)

Another book that may be of some help is "The Woodland Indians, of the Western Great Lakes, by Robert E. and Pat Ritzenthaler.

Objectives

1. To dispel the distorted stereotypes that still exist about early traditional Indian women.
2. To help the girls appreciate their tribal heritage.

3. To have the girls develop appreciation for self-respect.

Learning Experiences

For Girls 12 to 14 and 15 to 18

Before you start the unit, have the girls look through magazines for pictures of Indian women and how they are portrayed. They may have difficulty finding pictures. If this happens, maybe they can check the school library for filmstrips and make note of how the women are portrayed. This might be helpful in getting them to discuss the role of early Indian women.

1. Discuss with each age group the advantages and disadvantages of living as a traditional Indian woman. You might like to use the book, The Chippewa Indians: Rice Gatherers of the Great Lakes, by Sonia Bleeker. It might be helpful for the girls to discuss the following, or if they are unfamiliar with these items, for you to describe them to the girls:
   a. Harvesting wild rice or making maple sugar. Point out how difficult it still is today with modern equipment. Have the girls think about how much more difficult it must have been long ago when Indians did not have all this equipment.
   b. About beading and how difficult it is using beads. Compare it to the quillwork the women did—how they had to pull the quills, clean them, separate them according to size, cut the sharp ends off, and dye them (the things they used for dyes had to be gathered from the forest). What did they use for awls?
   c. The process of tanning hides.
2. You might like to show the girls the film Woodland Indians of Early America. The 11-minute film recreates the daily life of a Chippewa

family as they hunt wild turkey, harvest wild rice, and fish. The film can be ordered from the Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction, P. O. Box 2093, Madison, WI 53701.

3. You might like to invite a tribal elder to speak to the girls about harvesting wild rice, making maple syrup or beading.
4. Discuss and compare what Indian girls do today with what girls did long ago.
5. Discuss whether they are as well prepared to become adults as girls were long ago. Discuss pros and cons.
6. Do girls worry about self-respect today as they did long ago? Discuss how one gains self-respect. Discuss how one can lose it.
   It might be helpful to have the girls talk about how the stereotypes that were developed were harmful to Indian women and the effect such stereotypes still have on them today.
   If you get the girls to talk about what influenced the role of the Indian women and how, they might be able to start thinking about how peer pressure affects them. Is it good or is it bad?